

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3374

INFO AMEMBASSY MEXICO

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USIA FOR ILA; IPO/M

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SHUM, UY

SUBJECT: FALSE REPORTS ON THE ARREST AND TORTURE OF URUGUAYAN
JOURNALISTS

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY PRESS SOURCES ARE RECEIVING BY MAIL FROM MEX-ICO ANONYMOUS PROPAGANDA SHEETS WHICH, ACCORDING TO THE DOCUMENTS, ARE ALSO BEING SENT TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS FEDERATION. THE EMBASSY HAS CHECKED SPECIFIC DETAILED CHARGES OF DETENTION AND TORTURE OF URUGUAYAN JOURNALISTS AND FOUND THEM TO BE FALSE. ANOTHER SHEET CARRIED A XEROX COPY OF A LETTER OF QUESTIONABLE AUTHENTICITY, PURPORTEDLY FROM SENATOR MCGOVERN. DETAILS ARE PROVIDED BELOW FOR THE DEPARTMENT'S INFORMATION. END SUMMARY.

2. IN RECENT MONTHS THE EMBASSY HAS BEEN GIVEN BY LOCAL PRESS SOURCES ANTI-URUGUAYAN PROPAGANDA RECEIVED BY MAIL FROM SNONY-MOUS SOURCES IN MEXICO. ONE OF THE MOST RECENT MEXICAN DOCUMENTS CHARGED THAT THREE PROMINENT URUGUAYAN EDITORS-IN-CHIEF AND FIVE JOURNALISTS HAD BEEN ARRESTED JANUARY 16, 1977 IN THE INTERIOR CITY OF PAYSANDU WHILE ATTENDING A LUNCHEON. ACCORDING TO THIS
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REPORT THE EIGHT, FERNANDO MIGUEL BACCARO (EDITOR OF EL TELEGRAFO DE PAYSANDU), HECTOR LENS (EDITOR OF LA VOZ DEL PUEBLO), AND MODESTO LLANTADA (EDITOR OF TRIBUNA SALTENA), ALBERTO CASTRONOVO, AND CARLOS ARECHAVALETA (JOURNALISTS OF EL TELEGRAFO), JACINTO PIETRAFESA (LA VOZ DEL PUEBLO), AND ANTONINO BARCELA AND GUALBERTO PEREIRA ARIAS (TRIBUNA SALTENA), WERE DRAGGED OUT OF THE LUNCHEON AT GUN POINT WITHOUT EXPLANATION, AND WERE TAKEN TO A LOCAL MILITARY

BARRACKS COMMANDED BY A COL. "HEBER SARAVIA CONTI" WHERE THEY WERE INTERROGATED ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF THE LUNCHEON. THE DOCUMENT GOES ON TO ALLEGE THAT WHEN THE INTERROGATORS DID NOT RECEIVE THE REPLIES THEY WANTED, THEY BEAT THE PRISONERS TO THE POINT WHERE TWO, "ARECHAVALETA" AND "PEREIRA ARIAS", HAD TO BE TAKEN TO A LOCAL HOSPITAL, THE FORMER WITH BROKEN BONES AND THE LATTER WITH A HEART ATTACK. ACCORDING TO THE DOCUMENT THERE WAS NO WORD ABOUT THE FATE OF THE OTHERS. THESE EVENTS ALLEGEDLY AROUSED GREAT INDIGNATION IN THE CITIES OF PAYSANDU, SALTO AND TUCAUREMBO, BUT THE LOCAL PRESS HAS COVERED UP THE ENTIRE AFFAIR AND TWO FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS WERE THREATENED WITH EXPULSION IF THEY SENT THE STORY ABROAD.

3. DUE TO THE GRAVITY OF THESE CHARGES, THEIR SPECIFICITY, OUR ACQUAINTANCE WITH SOME OF THE ALLEGED VICTIMS AND THE FACT THAT AN EMBOFF HAS JUST MET WITH ONE OF THEM, THE EMBASSY LOOKED INTO THE VERACITY OF THE STORY. BY PHONE ON MARCH 4, A TRIBUNA SALTENA WRITER TOLD AN EMBOFF CONTACT THAT: (1) THERE WAS NO SUCH LUNCHEON HELD ON JANUARY 16; (2) ON THE ALLEGED DATE OF THE MEETING THE EDITOR OF TRIBUNA SALTENA WAS IN SALTOS AND THE EDITOR OF EL TELEGRAFO DE PAYSANDU WAS IN LA PALOMA, BOTH SOME DISTANCE FROM THE SCENE OF THE ALLEGED EVENTS; (3) NONE OF THE NAMES OF THE "JOURNALISTS" (AS APART FROM EDITORS) SUPPOSEDLY ARRESTED ARE KNOWN IN PRESS CIRCLES, NOR DO THEY WORK FOR THE NEWSPAPERS MENTIONED; (4) THERE IS NO COMMANDER OF A MILITARY BARRACKS NAMED COLONEL HEBER SARAVIA CONTI IN PAYSANDU; (5) THE ENTIRE STORY IS FALSE. THIS WAS SUBSTANTIATED IN WRITING IN THE MARCH 3 ISSUE OF TRIBUNA SALTENA WHICH JUST REACHED THE EMBASSY. EDITOR LLANTADO, IN A SIGNED, FRONT PAGE ARTICLE, REJECTED ALL UNCLASSIFIED

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ALLEGATIONS, STATING THAT HE HAD ALSO CALLED HIS COLLEAGUE AT EL TELEGRAFO IN PAYSANDU AND VERIFIED THAT A LT. COL. MEIRELES, NOT A COL. SARAVIA, WAS BATTALION COMMANDER THERE AND THE NEITHER OF THE JOURNALISTS REPORTED AS WORKING FOR EL TELEGRAFO WORKED FOR THAT PAPER.

4. OTHER SOURCES ALSO INDICATE THAT THE STORY IS FALSE. AN EMBOFF MET AT LENGTH WITH ONE OF THE ALLEGED VICTIMS SHORTLY AFTER THE SUPPOSED TORTURE TOOK PLACE. THE MAN SEEMED TO BE FINE AND HE MADE NO MENTION OF HAVING BEEN ARRESTED OR TORTURED. MONTEVIDEO PRESS SOURCES TOLD THE EMBASSY'S INFORMATION OFFICER THAT THEY WOULD HAVE HEARD OF THE INCIDENT HAD THEIR COLLEAGUES IN THE INTERIOR HAD ANY SUCH EXPERIENCES. THE "JOURNALISTS" ARE UNKNOWN TO A SENIOR USIS LOCAL WHO KNOWS MOST OF THE NEWSPAPERMEN IN THE INTERIOR. FINALLY, THE DAO CHECKED THE ROSTER OF THE URUGUAYAN ARMY AND THERE IS NO COL. HEBER SARAVIA IN THE ARMY.

5. THE EMBASSY RECEIVED NO OTHER REPORTS REGARDING THE ALLEGED EVENTS IN PAYSANDU JANUARY 16 AND BELIEVES THE ENTIRE STORY TO BE

A FABRICATION.

6. ANOTHER SIMILAR DOCUMENT FROM THE SAME SOURCE REACHED US ON MARCH 4. ONE OF ITS SEVEN PAGES CARRIED A FACSIMILE OF WHAT WAS PURPORTEDLY A LETTER FROM SENATOR MCGOVERN TO THE "OFFICE OF CONGRESSIONAL RELATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE" ASKING THAT THE DEPARTMENT DEMONSTRATE ITS CONCERN FOR JAIME PEREZ (A LEADER OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF URUGUAY). ALTHOUGH THE LETTER IS ON A SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE LETTERHEAD, ITS SALUATION, "DEAR FRIENDS", AND ITS STATEMENT THAT PEREZ IS CHARGED WITH UNDERMINING THE "MORALITY" (RATHER THAN MORALE) OF THE ARMED FORCES LEADS US TO QUESTION ITS AUTHENTICITY. THIRD, THE LETTER IS UNSIGNED. A COPY IS BEING POUCHED TO ARA/ECA.

7. THE DEPARTMENT IS BEING ADVISED OF THIS IN DETAIL AS IT MAY WELL RECIEVE INQUIRIES.

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Message Attributes

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Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
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Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 07-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
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Disposition Event:
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